

Stradley, Bland Lloyd

Convocation address, August, 1936

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Dr. B. L. Stradley

CONVOCAATION ADDRESS

(Summer, 1936)

Dean McPherson, Ladies, and Gentlemen:

To you, our honored guests--the mothers, fathers and friends of these graduates--and to you, the teachers in this University, and to all others, who assemble here to unite with us in rendering these honors, who cheer us with your interest and favor, we extend greetings and a respectful and grateful welcome.

At the outset, this afternoon, let us bear in mind that this is possibly the fifth commencement ceremony for a few members of this class, the fourth for some, and, for many others, only the third. As for the professors here, we can only guess how many commencement exercises they have witnessed.

The great naturalist, Hudson, once was asked how long he had been married, and in the presence of his dear wife, he unwittingly-- and rather ungallantly--replied that he had been married for "as long as he could remember." Now, most of you graduates assembled here have been in school, either as students or teachers, for almost as long as you can remember. Why is it that you have been in school or college for so long? One reason is that education has been presented to you in such a way that you have liked it. Another reason is that a fundamental biological law has been operating in your lives. This law has manifested itself in the form of a desire or instinct seasoned with love for you by your parents that you might be blessed with the advantages of an education which in many instances was denied them. This desire has been expressed or implied by hundreds of parents who have counseled with me concerning the education of their children. "This biological force is to be trusted more than any legislative or any moral exhortation, because it is rooted in the very nature of man." May I urge every member of this class who has had access to the intellectual treasures of the ages, to be grateful to your teachers, to your parents, to your State, and to all others who have assisted you on the way to your present achievements. Remember this, if you please--"Ingratitude is the most unpardonable of sins."

The past few years have witnessed the celebration of notable events in the history of our nation. Three years ago we signalized with fitting ceremonies 300 years of secondary education in America; a year ago in the city of Chicago we fittingly celebrated a "Century of Progress" in Commerce, Industry and Agriculture; this year, 1936, we are reminded that we should commemorate three centuries of higher education in America.

Would that everyone present might humbly bow his head in grateful recognition of the achievements of higher education during these three centuries. We speak of education in terms of the centuries. Education is a long process and a continuous process. It begins at birth, it should continue through life, and it ends at death. There are some who believe it continues even after death. Who knows?

Let us never forget the founding principle of higher education as expressed by the forefathers early in the 17th century--many of whom were Oxford and Cambridge trained. "After God had carried us safe to New England," they said, "and after we had builded our houses, provided necessities for our livelihood, reared convenient churches for God's worship, and settled the civil government, one of the next things longed for and looked after, was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall be in the dust."

It has indeed been 300 years since the first institution of higher learning was established in this country.

This is not the occasion for a complete review of the progress and development of higher education during these three centuries. It is enough to remind ourselves of these simple facts:

1. Today there are more than 1400 institutions of higher education in the United States.
2. There are more than 1,200,000 students enrolled in the regular sessions of these 1700 institutions.
3. There are about 100,000 men and women teaching in these institutions.
4. The total financial assets---including buildings, grounds, equipment, and endowments---of all these institutions amount to about four billion dollars. (Do you know of any corporations in the United States whose assets are that great?)
5. The total expenditures for last year were in the neighborhood of 500 millions.

I have been speaking only of higher education. If we were to include figures for the lower levels of education we would readily understand why education has become not only the most important but the biggest of all the "Big Business" in our land.

A few years ago, the Honorable H.A.L. Fisher, Minister of Education in the government of Lloyd George, visited this country. Upon his return to London he gave out an interview in which he said that "Education is the Religion of America." He went on to say that he had been impressed by the fact that Americans are made to feel that all national and international problems will disappear when everybody is educated and that regardless of individual liberty the country is proceeding on that theory.

When we note the astonishing recent growth of higher education in this country we can find ample justification for that viewpoint. Whereas in 1910 only about 3 and a half per cent of the United States population of college age were actually in college, last year almost one sixth of the young people of college age were actually enrolled in our colleges and universities.

This tremendous drive for higher education has of course brought in its wake many perplexing and challenging problems for the colleges and universities. Problems of administration, of admissions, of plant facilities, of curriculum requirements, of housing, of teaching, of guidance, have lately given our administrative officers and teachers no end of "toil and trouble."

This great rush toward our colleges and universities in the last twenty five or thirty years has also created another problem--and one of equal importance. This problem concerns the need--the necessity--for some kind of adequate control and regulation of our vast array of higher educational institutions.

Let us ask ourselves these questions: Why is regulation necessary in higher education? Why are standards necessary? By whom and by what means may these standards be established and maintained?

The citizen of France, of Germany, or of Italy does not have to concern himself much about such questions. In those countries, and in other European countries, the national government takes care of these and similar problems, by virtue of the fact that it exercises almost complete control over all branches of public education. For example, in the constitution of one of the more recently formed European states, namely, Czechoslovakia, we may read this declaration:

"The supreme authority and control over all instruction and Education shall be in the hands of the State (meaning, of course, the national government)".

The American Constitution does not accord such vast authority over education to our Federal Government. We Americans conceive of all public education as a function of the separate states--and its local communities. Now the community--or the state--is simply the sum of its individual citizens. Theoretically, at least, the citizens of each state, of each community, may have the standards and practices in their public educational institutions which they desire. Our democratic philosophy of government and of education implies that it is ultimately up to the people themselves to determine what kind of public education they will have.

Although the citizens possess the authority to regulate and control higher education, they do not usually exercise it in a direct way. They have delegated the problem of regulation and control to certain educational and standardizing associations. University administrators and professors acting, in the dual capacity of teachers and practitioners and working through their professional organizations, occupy a dominant position in the development and the establishment of standards for professional education. The colleges and universities are the natural agencies of society to put new criteria into effect.

Workers in the field of higher education have long realized that the problem of regulating and controlling the standards and practices of our higher educational institutions is a vital problem. They should realize also--if they have not--as a great philosopher reminds us, "Society is founded not on ideals (alone) but on the nature of man." "Men," he says, "are so diverse in capacity and courage that without restraints their natural differences would breed and multiply through artificial inequalities into a stagnant and hopeless stratification of mankind." It is wise for us to remember that our educational institutions are administered by man; hence, the necessity for restraints. "Civilization without restraints is as yet impossible."

As an illustration of the need for restraint and control in higher education let us consider for a moment the activities of one of those spurious and fraudulent institutions often referred to as "diploma mills." Such institutions are organized and operated by individuals without honor or conscience and solely for the purpose of making money for their owners through the sale of degrees to ignorant and gullible clients.

It was discovered twelve or thirteen years ago that one of these spurious diploma mills was operating in our national capitol. This institution had assumed the name "Oriental University". Its activities soon became suspect to the American Council on Education (a non-governmental organization). Through the initiative of that body an investigation was made by the Department of Justice on the grounds that the institution had been using the mails to defraud. The case was brought to trial in December 1925, in the District of Columbia Supreme Court. The evidence brought in revealed that this so-called "University" was not a bona-fide educational institution, that it gave practically no real instruction, had no competent faculty, and that in the course of three years it had conferred over 600 fictitious degrees of all sorts. These degrees naturally had no value whatsoever and were given solely for the purpose of collecting a considerable fee.

The individual who was primarily responsible for this educational fraud was eventually fined and sentenced to Leavenworth.

There have been dozens of institutions like the "Oriental University" which have been organized by unscrupulous men. Many of them have flourished for a time and have disappeared. That most of them have disappeared is due to the activities of educational associations like the American Council on Education and the various voluntary standardizing associations which have worked and are working constantly and consistently toward establishing adequate standards and restraints in higher education.

As an example of constructive effort on the part of men of ideals who have been devoted to the maintenance of high standards in their profession for the benefit of the public interest we can point to the field of medical education.

The records of the American Medical Association reveal in striking fashion the development that has taken place in the laboratory methods, organization, and administration of medical education in this country. When the A. M. A. took it upon itself some years ago to raise the standards of medical education in America, almost a hundred commercial medical schools quickly disappeared because they could not meet the requirements that the Association said would have to be met. The publication of a list of approved medical schools backed up by the profession and public opinion was the controlling factor in the improvement of medical education in the United States.

If it be true that medical education thus far has failed, in some respects, to adapt itself to the social changes in our dynamic national life, the only hope of making the necessary adaptations lies with the leadership of the profession embodied in its own professional association.

In similar fashion legal education has kept pace with changing social and economic conditions by virtue of the intelligent leadership of public-spirited members of the profession itself. A local example is in point. You remember that a few years ago the legislature of this state approved two years of liberal arts training for all prospective law students. The bill passed the legislature but received executive veto. The veto message, stated that a law of this kind would have prevented Abraham Lincoln from practicing law. Then a strange thing occurred. The lawyers acting through their professional association decided

that it is the Supreme Court and not the legislature which certifies legal education in the State of Ohio; A committee of the Ohio Bar Association recommended that the two-year liberal arts rule be approved. The Supreme Court approved this recommendation. The regulation is now in effect.

Let us observe again that it was actually the members of the legal profession acting through their recognized associations who brought about a regulation conceived in the interests of higher standards and protection of the public weal.

Another example where conscience, honor, and unselfishness are seen operating in the interests of higher standards and adequate regulation is found in the history of higher education itself. When we study the history and development of graduate schools in this country, we observe that the strongest movement in behalf of higher standards for graduate study was initiated by the graduate students themselves.

Late in the last century graduate students of reputable graduate schools organized what were known as "Graduate Clubs." In considering applications for admission to these Clubs it was seen that there was a great deal of variation in the amount and kind of work required for the doctor's degree. In one school, for instance, there was no residence requirement--in fact, little, if anything, required. Thereupon the deans of the leading graduate schools were advised of this condition and were offered suggestions for standardizing graduate work in the various schools. Shortly after that the Association of American Universities was organized. This voluntary organization had as its chief purpose the improvement and standardization of graduate work in the fifteen leading universities on the North American continent.

Now some of us may say that standardizing is paralyzing and that it takes from us that previous possession called "liberty." A great philosopher has answered that "it is not law that takes our liberty from us; it is the innocuous desuetude of our minds..." Let us observe again that society is based not on ideals but on the fundamental nature of Man. Men, like institutions, must have restraints or they eventually perish even as society perishes with them.

There is a Chinese proverb to the effect that when a nation begins to have too many laws it is slipping into senility. And it is said that the ancient Thurians provided a halter for every unsuccessful proponent of new laws, suggesting his fit punishment for an attempt to mutilate their liberty. But in this modern world, we recognize that order is a means to liberty--not merely an end in itself.

It has not been an easy matter to maintain order and integrity in the field of higher learning in these United States. Men of ideals and men of integrity have paid the price. It is not mere accident or chance that the University which will soon confer your degrees is one of the thirty two members of the Association of American Universities; that three of its deans have recently been elected presidents of their respective international professional associations. These achievements mean that your degrees have integrity and character. You have earned your degrees. They have not been purchased with gold but with the coin of honest effort, diligent application, and courageous devotion to the ideals of true scholarship.



I have spoken a little about the integrity of educational institutions. But what I have said about integrity in the operation of our universities will apply equally well, I hope, to the lives of individuals.

The only justification for the expenditure of public funds on you graduates is the return in constructive citizenship that the state justly expects of you. On one of our magnificent public buildings these words are inscribed in stone: "Education and morality constitute the force and majesty of free government." Education and morality and the operation of reasonable restraints, the operation of that invisible self-control within you will likewise constitute the force and majesty of your lives which will make you free men and women. A great metropolitan editor told me recently that the great control or restraint in his life was his father's advice given to him a thousand times--"Son, act the part of a man."

You who are now leaving this institution will have constantly to face the challenge of preserving your integrity and of maintaining order in your lives. "Be sure that you have standards of mind and character by which always to test your actions in the days to come, and see to it that these standards stay before you as a pillar of fire by night and of cloud by day."

If the colleges and universities which you have attended have fulfilled their primary obligation to you--if they have brought about desirable changes in your habits of thinking and in your way of living--they should have helped you to understand to know values, they should have taught you to shun that which is common and dross and to seek out that which is good and that which is enduring.

Courage, honesty, diligence, integrity, are, and always have been, fundamental virtues. The University which you are now leaving has tried to make it possible that you acquire these virtues. It is our earnest hope that the years spent in school and college mean that through the absorption of the moral, intellectual, and esthetic inheritance of our race, you have come to understand and control yourselves; that you have learned to add courtesy to culture; wisdom to knowledge, and forgiveness to understanding. And as you go now into your various careers, we are proud and happy to bid you Godspeed.